

CROSNIER

Latter-Day Converts

HENNESSY



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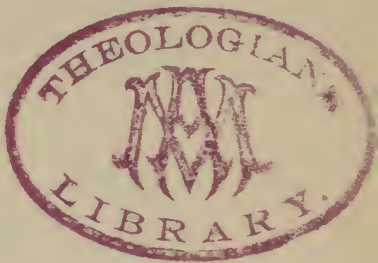
Translated from the French

OF

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BY

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PREFACE.

THE story of a conversion has a twofold interest, the one human, the other supernatural. On the human side there is something of romance, the great adventure of a soul traversing the perilous but finally happy way from darkness to light; on the supernatural, it brings us into the region of mystery, for the ultimate why we are unable to probe, lying as it does at the inscrutable fountain-heads of the divine grace. But it is not for the purpose of either the merely human, or even the supernatural interest, though both are essentially bound up in the recital, that the Abbé Crosnier has given to the world the story of the conversion of five of the most eminent figures in literary France in recent times. His object is rather to construct what may be called a living apologetic out of the history of the conversion of Ferdinand Brunetière, Paul Bourget, Joris-Karl Huysmans, François Coppée and Adolphe Retté.

It has been urged repeatedly by the enemies of the faith, and this especially in France, where the attack on the Church has been more thoroughly and successfully organized than anywhere else in the world, that men of intellectual eminence are neither to be found within her fold nor seeking admission, with the obvious conclusion that she is reactionary, behind the times, and possesses nothing of value either to hold or to attract the intellectual and the learned.

Abbé Crosnier points to and rehearses the story of the conversion of these five eminent Frenchmen as a refutation of the slander and a vindication of the Church's claim to be the mother of truth, where all honest seekers, be they great or little, ignorant or learned, may find full satisfaction both for mind and heart. In France such an apologetic is especially pertinent at the present day. In the English-speaking world, its bearing is perhaps not so obviously forceful, as amongst us there is not the same rancorous and organized hostility to the Church, and the

public mind has in recent years awakened to the realization that perhaps there is something good out of Nazareth after all. Nevertheless there is still a vast area needing enlightenment and edification as to the relations between the Church and the intellectual life amongst those who speak our mother tongue; and the Abbé Crosnier's little work may awaken an interest and enkindle a flame in the semi-darkness.

For the Catholic public the apologetic value is of interest as another testimony amongst many of the drawing power of Catholic truth in open minds and sincere hearts. Here are five contemporary men, illustrious in the world of letters, who came to the faith because it satisfied the aspirations of mind and heart, each in his own way to a common result. Brunetière found science, confining the term to the sense in which it has been used in recent years as the rationalistic antithesis of religion, bankrupt; it could not meet the needs of the intellect seeking the ultimate solution of life; in the Church alone is the fulness of truth to be found. Huys-

mans was led along the highway of art; craving beauty, the complement of truth, he found his way back to the church of his youth. He learned to realize that in her inspiration and under her fostering care beauty found its loftiest and sublimest expression in her great cathedrals and her wonderful liturgical music. Along this path he traversed the way from what may be called the slums of degradation to the purliens of the mystical city. Adolphe Retté's conversion was a revulsion from sensualism and the barrenness of indifferentism, which had made a waste in his soul, to the richness and fulness of the newly discovered truth of the faith, though not without many dark misgivings and dreadful hesitations. François Coppée, through the chastening power of pain and healthy sentiment, which is always a guiding star to honest souls, returned to the church of his childhood's innocence. Paul Bourget discovered that modern sociology founded on the barren rationalism of the times neither explains human institutions nor saves them from the shipwreck

which threatens them when they abandon the guiding star of the supernatural. With a cool and searching analysis into the modern situation, he found that the family and the state require for their preservation the safeguards and guidance of the principles of Christianity as enunciated and guarded by the Catholic Church.

In these eminent instances we have a living apologetic for the faith. This is the special emphasis of the Abbé Crosnier's little work. Science, art, sociology, sentiment, and the insistent need of human nature, when astray in the wilderness of doubt, find their only solution in the living faith of the Church of Jesus Christ. Here is a vindication and a triumph, a vindication against the slander that she has no claim upon the modern intellect, and a triumph in the testimony of the illustrious example of five of France's most distinguished sons seeking and finding complete peace of mind and heart in her universal truth.

CONDÉ B. PALLEN.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

“TELL us, Mary, what thou hast seen in the way?” “The sepulchre of Christ, Who lives, and the glory of Him Who is risen.”¹ This chant which the Catholic Church joyfully intones on Easter morning, she has oftentimes repeated, not by way of celebrating the resurrection of the dead whose tombs border the Appian Way and fill our cemeteries, but in exultant recognition of spiritual resurrections which attest the unfailing power of Christ and the vitality of His work here below. She repeats it, in this our day, when her torch is said to be on the verge of extinction, just as she did when her dominion appeared most firmly established and she encountered fewer obstacles in her onward

¹ *Dic nobis, Maria, quid vidisti in via? . . . Sepulcrum Christi viventis, et gloriam vidi resurgentis.* Taken from the prose, *Victimæ pascali laudes.*

march through civilization and the nations.
. . . It is her song of eternal springtime.

I have endeavored to interpret it apropos of several conversions that have been a source of great joy to the Church as well as an immense advantage.

The following pages originally contributed to the *Revue pratique d'Apologétique*, are now published separately and with slight revisions, having been assigned a place in the "new library" that M. Gabriel Beauchesne is building up under the title of *Apologétique vivante*. This is, of course, highly complimentary to me and to my little treatise which, when sent out into the world, will, I trust, be productive of some good.

A. C.

LATTER-DAY CONVERTS.

ALTHOUGH in existence for nearly nineteen centuries, the Catholic Church is still young, and all these years of well-nigh incessant suffering have neither furrowed her brow nor exhausted her vitality.

To-day, as of old, she has a wonderful faculty for expanding. In the course of ages the "torch of faith" has passed from one nation to another,¹ but even amongst those peoples that have remained thoroughly Christian, it does not always shine with the same steady brilliancy as there are constantly, especially in times of persecution, lamentable defections and astonishing apostasies. This is because man is a weak creature and, as Montaigne says, "wavering and inconstant."

Like nature, which in each recurring Spring strews flowers upon the graves of

¹ Cf. Fénelon's sermon for the Epiphany.

the dead, the Catholic Church, palpitating with the life of God, is constantly repairing her ruins, but, more powerful than nature, she opens graves and bids the dead come forth. These resurrections are called conversions. The erring children who, to use Adolphe Retté's vigorous expression, turn "from the devil to God,"¹ are more or less numerous according to the times, but by a providential compensation it seems that conversions are most notable and frequent when the Church is being persecuted, for is not "the blood of martyrs the seed of Christians"? We never know all of these converts, many of whom remain in obscurity either through humility or a certain modesty or because of their inability to tell their own story to the public. Others—and these are a small minority—lay bare their souls, reveal to us the means used by God in bringing them back from afar, and give either a long, detailed account in book form or,

¹ St. Paul's expression in the *Acts of the Apostles* (XXVI, 18): *ut convertatur . . . de potestate Sathanæ ad Deum.*

in the course of a treatise or lecture, make a concise statement of what led to their conversion. It is to the latest and best known of these converts—selected from the world of letters—to what they tell us of themselves and, on the other hand, to what our vexed adversaries say of them, that I would now call the attention of my readers.

I.

Of recent years the Church has beheld either joining or rejoining her fold such eminent scholars as Ferdinand Brunetière, Paul Bourget, Joris-Karl Huysmans, François Coppée and Adolphe Retté. . . . To these names some would deem it necessary to add those of Paul Verlaine who, between his strange crises, so admirably produced *Ma Mère Marie*; and Francis Jammes, the candid, symbolistic poet with the abrupt, disconnected style who at first strayed into the dark forest but nevertheless tarried near enough to the little “vine-grown” church to hear

the *Angélus de l'Aube* and the *Angélus du Soir* ring out from the rustic belfry and, attracted by the voice of the bell, entered the church where, in the Sacramental Presence, he found peace and certainty. Both of these men have had pious emotions and have sung sweet songs but as their cases are not so striking, we shall confine ourselves to the experience of the other writers.

These conversions, and others, are a source of intense joy to the Church, a joy similar to that which the Gospel tells us was felt by the father upon the homecoming of his lost child. When, having returned from the distant land of error and passion, the prodigal reëntered the paternal abode, his father lavished upon him all sorts of caresses and loving attentions, even to the extent of seeming forgetful of his other son who had never left him and who was amazed at these tender demonstrations. And Jesus, Who by this portrayal wished to give us a picture of Our Father in heaven, caused the prodigal's father thus to meet the objec-

tion raised against the wanderer's reception: "But it was fit that we should make merry and be glad, for this, thy brother, was dead, and is come to life again: he was lost and is found." (St. Luke XV, 32). Moreover, Jesus again alludes to this touching episode when, after relating the parable of the lost sheep, He concludes: "I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance." (St. Luke XV, 7). Naturally the Church upon earth echoes the Church in heaven and as she was commissioned like Christ and by Him to recover the lost sheep of the House of Israel and of all mankind, the return of the wanderer and the sinner touches her maternal heart. It would seem as if she, too, readily forgets the faithful souls whom it is not necessary to seek; but these understand because they love and they are in no wise offended by her manifestation of this tender solicitude, for they have learned in the school of Jesus that it is the duty of one and all to

be apostles and to sacrifice themselves for their sinful brethren.

With this celestial joy is blended a delightful consolation which is all the more helpful in that it comes at a most critical moment. The tempest rages against the Church to-day just as in the darkest days of the past, and her enemies who, with satanic hatred, are persecuting her for doing Christ's work, have determined to annihilate her. For this reason they attack the Latin nations amongst which she has been so long and so firmly established, most especially Catholic France, her eldest daughter whom she had imbued with her doctrine and morals and had trained with predilection to be unto the world the missionary of evangelical civilization, making this assault because convinced that if France falls she will bring down with her the entire Christian edifice. Hence they are adroitly laying siege to the Church in France and, to further their cause, using all means whether above-board or otherwise, notably the press—over which they have almost absolute con-

trol and in which they simply deluge her with calumnies—and an outrageous educational system whereby pupils of all ages are too often utterly dechristianized. Their plan, hatched in the *arrière-Loges* and executed by slow degrees — just as poison is administered in small doses so as not to arouse the suspicion of the sick man whom it is intended to kill—is to deprive the Church of her intellectual prestige and of all social influence, having first robbed her of her property and her rights. They purpose reducing her to utter destitution and silence, when lo! she whom they had supposed dead or moribund, revives, becomes singularly active and makes proselytes even in her enemy's camp. Voices beloved and admired that have rung with talent, learning and eloquence, are raised in favor of Christ and His doctrine, and the enemy is stupefied. The Church Militant listens with joy, smiling through her tears upon those children who come to her assistance and in whom she feels such pride.

Yes, pride is none too strong a word,

as the decided inclination of men of intellect toward Catholicism, precisely at the moment when troops of free-thinkers are uniting, in the name of science, to make a most formidable attack upon it, is a magnificent tribute to the vitality of the Catholic Church. I am well aware, and so is the Church, that there is one of Christ's sayings with which they could upbraid her in an endeavor to crush her legitimate pride: "I give thanks to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones. Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in thy sight;" (St. Matt. XI, 25, 26) and a similar one of St. Paul: "For see your vocation, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble: But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise: and the weak things of the world hath God chosen that he may confound the strong. . . ." (I Cor. I, 26, 27). However, logically speaking, neither Christ nor St. Paul

thereby intended to give the Church a license for ignorance nor to exclude from her pale scholars and men of intelligence.

Jesus teaches simply that the wise and the prudent must humble themselves if they would be instructed by the Heavenly Father and enter His kingdom, and St. Paul repudiates the proud wisdom of the flesh and preaches the folly of the Cross. . .

Moreover was not St. Paul himself the first great genius to do homage to our faith by espousing it, thus becoming the predecessor of Origen, Basil, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Pascal, Bossuet and so many others who form such a brilliant group in the immense family of Christ?

Like St. Paul, and without abjuring their reason, all these great men became humble and lowly that they might learn the things of Heaven, and in their train—to restrict ourselves to literature, which Taine has appropriately called a “living psychology”—have followed those whom I mentioned a few moments since and others

like them who, without any abandonment of their reason, have surrendered their proud spirit (*superbia vitae*) to the authority of the Church. One of the number, the most independent and the ablest logician of them all, being conquered by truth, cried out when in Lille: "What do I believe? . . . Go to Rome and inquire;"¹ to Rome, to the Vatican, where the Pope, the Vicar of Christ upon earth, holds his court. All these converts repeat the same thing and their testimony is strengthened by the fact that they hail from all parts of the literary horizon and include artists of the subtle type like Huysmans; poets gifted with flowing numbers like François Coppée and Adolphe Retté; well-informed philosophers like Georges Dumesnil;² sociologists like Paul

¹ *Discours de combat* by F. Brunetière, 2nd series: *Les raisons actuelles de croire*, p. 43.

² Cf. *Le Spiritualisme* (Société française d'imprimerie et librairie, 1895) by Georges Dumesnil, Professor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Letters of Grenoble, and *L'Amitié de France*, the new review that he has been conducting for over a year and in which he has as-

Bourget and critics and scholars who have read and probed everything and who, with fervid eloquence and originality of thought have, as Brunetière said of himself, run the "full length of the *literary* keyboard."

Surely the Church has a right to boast of such conquests!

"But," you may say to me, "because men of splendid talent have come back to the Church you cry 'victory,' whereas you do not count all those who, just as respectable and clever, remain at the door and defy your faith. Taken as a whole, this hostile testimony weakens the other. . . ."

Not at all. I willingly admit that if all men of great intellectual calibre were hostile or indifferent to our faith, there would be quite a strong argument against it, one which at least to the weaker brethren, would be a stumbling-block; but, thank God, such is not the case. However,

summed and maintained such a commendable and courageous attitude in regard to Catholic truth. (Gabriel Beauchesne, publisher.)

without pretending to explain the *mystery* of predestination or to penetrate the inner life of souls, it is not very difficult to find motives for the indifference of some and the hostility of others. The indifferent are undoubtedly the more numerous and certainly there is occasion to share Pascal's astonishment concerning the mentality of those who are little interested in this one great problem of life. However, religious ignorance, which is being propagated at such an alarming rate, and the incessant pursuit of pleasure or of occupations which, in our feverish life, become more and more absorbing, all these causes, while excusing nothing, account in some measure for so strange a state of soul. But, of hostile men, beware! You will discover that they are swayed either by evil passions which can not endure the sight of the Cross that condemns them, or by "intellectual pride" which begets stiff-necked, knee-bound arrogance; or else—and alas this scourge is becoming too common at the present day when, under the influence of Godless teaching we

are witnessing a veritable pagan renaissance — by the hateful prejudices implanted in souls through an essentially naturalistic education. In addition to all this, the conflict between fallen nature and the “super-nature,” waged from the beginning of the world and still on, at least in this our country, is being not only sustained but aggravated by the political ambitions and alluring promises of triumphant sectarianism. Briefly, these incentives are all human, in fact too human, and seem to me to do but meagre honor either to those whom they actuate or to the cause which these defend.

Moreover, here as in all things else, the point in question is not the counting but the weighing of testimonies with a view to recognizing their value and convincing force. As for me, I would conclude even at first glance, that the calm, unruffled industry of a Pasteur, the irreproachable candor of a Coppée and the eloquent, vigorous reasoning of a Brunetière could never be outbalanced by the narrow sectarianism of a Marcellin Berthelot (whose

learning I do not question), the skeptical and misleading dilettanteism of a Renan or the elegant facetiousness of an Anatole France.¹ But we must investigate further, since, to learn not only how much joy, consolation and glory but also what help and strength the Church has derived from the conversion of these men of talent, it is necessary to know what motives impelled them to enter the fold. Let me, therefore, dwell somewhat at length on this point.

II.

These illustrious converts have endeavored to reveal to us a few of the motives that brought them back to religion and, through religion, to the Catholic Church; but, note well, they neither attempt to disclose all these motives nor to give in full detail those which they do make known. They tell us principally of the *occasion* of their conversion and dilate

¹ Always very elegant but who seems more facetious than ever since he has published his *Jeanne d'Arc*, of which I may speak at some future day.

upon the reasons that first influenced them: reasons of an artistic, mystical, philosophical, moral, social or even sentimental order, which to them seemed the most decisive and are therefore apt to impress the greatest number of minds and hearts. Other reasons of a more intimate nature are altogether too delicate to mention and too complicated to unravel. In a celebrated discourse Ferdinand Brunetière, after having set forth the “ actual (eternal) reasons for believing,” added: “ I have others, more intimate and more personal!”¹ Either he had not the time or he lacked the desire to relate them in detail, and we respect his silence just as, on the other hand, we welcome the ex-

¹ *Discours de combat*, new series: *Les raisons actuelles de croire*, p. 45. In the *Revue générale* (Aug., 1907), I read: “ F. Brunetière . . . entered the Church because the Church was the logical end of his long, patient and laborious quest and because she alone offered this earnest wayfarer in search of truth, that which he had vainly sought elsewhere: a government, a tradition and a sociology.” These lines by F. Van den Bosch are indeed true but F. Brunetière had other more *intimate* reasons.

PLICIT revelations of a St. Augustine, a Coppée or a Retté. However, I must admit that, in a last analysis, no one of them could claim to unveil either the secret workings of the Holy Ghost or the operation of grace in his soul, as these must ever remain an ineffable mystery.

It is scarcely necessary to say that as faith is a supernatural virtue and consequently a gratuitous gift of God, none of these men could have merited it, and to affirm or believe that they could, would be not only insolent and presumptuous but positively heretical. However, insofar as they were able, they coöperated with the action of grace: when God spoke, they answered; when His truth manifested itself to their minds they “gave themselves up to it”¹ or, better still, openly embraced it, to the utter disregard of the lies that might have dimmed their vision of it. As the illustrious Newman said, they have not “sinned against the light.” Moreover, because Catholicism is not alone a belief

¹ It was thus that Benoit expressed himself as Besangon.

but a rule of life, having become believers, they lived up to their faith. (Not that they encountered no obstacle in giving the full adherence of their intellect and in making this supreme effort of their will, for we know that the light of faith shines through obscurity, that the human will is ever weak and that the process of changing one's heart and creating for one's self, as it were, a new temperament, is a long and difficult one,¹ but they fought bravely on, they prayed and, with the aid of grace, triumphed. There is a potent charm in following in their writings the account of

¹ "The very constitution of the human heart enables us to understand the slowness of every religious conversion. . . . The freely-taken step by which an intelligent man determines his destiny, demands long preparation of mind and heart. What the ear has heard, the heart must sanction: what the mind has grasped, the whole soul must approve. Besides, how many prejudices must be dissipated and impressions effaced! Then too, as religion lays hold of the innermost fibres of the soul, a *new temperament* must be substituted for the old and, as it were, a second nature created." (*Le Réveil du catholicisme en Angleterre au XIXème siècle*, by J. Guibert, p. 121. Paris, Vve Ch. Poussielgue, publisher.)

those interior struggles the outcome of which allayed their intellectual anxiety and put an end to the vacillations of their will. Besides, since in this our day, one can not be a good Christian without being an apostle, these converts became the apostles of the faith which they had so laboriously regained. Both in prose and verse François Coppée extolled the blessings of the religion of Jesus Christ, and in each of his late novels, *L'Etape*, *Un Divorce* and even *L'Emigré*, Paul Bourget became, as it were, the expounder of the social fecundity of Catholicism. And what is the *Foules de Lourdes* if not a hymn of love and gratitude to the new Eve, to the Virgin: "Lumière de bonté qui ne connaît pas les soirs, Havre des pleure-misères, Marie des compatissances, Mère des pitiés;" who, under the title of the Immaculate Conception, revealed herself in the grotto of Massabielle, to a lowly shepherdess. *Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam*, a veritable heart product, is indeed a strange book but, withal, very captivating and, if we reflect upon Huysmans's hero-

ism in his last illness and at the time of his death, strongly suggestive of the author's own sufferings. Moreover, it is no exaggeration to assert that Brunetière fell, sword in hand, fighting for the faith like a valiant soldier and endeavoring to smooth for others the "roads to belief." Those who have seen him seated at the lecturer's table, who have beheld the quick fire of his glance and listened to his martial voice sounding the charge, have felt that each one of his *Discours de combat* was diminishing his strength and sapping the life's blood from his veins. And what of Adolphe Retté, the last to join the fold? Is he not even now ¹ in Belgium with the exiled Benedictines, putting the finishing touches to the conversion the beginnings of which he has described in a soul-stirring book, and fitting himself by prayer and meditation for the apostolic life he desires to lead in the world? ² By indulg-

¹ 1908.

² Whilst this book was being translated, Adolphe Retté applied for admission and was received into the Benedictine Order. (Translator's note.)

ing in these reflections I may seem to be deviating from my subject; but no, one thing contributes to the understanding of another, and acts such as these shed a powerful light on the motives that have produced them.

It is not only fair but most gratifying to call attention to the fact that no human interest influenced these men in their decision. At the time that they resolutely joined the Catholic ranks, the Church had no material advantage to offer them; and the State that had fallen into the power of the Masonic Lodges and was therefore most severe upon the Church from which it was about to separate or indeed had already separated, the State, I say, was highly indignant with Catholicism's new recruits whose change of allegiance proved an opportune blow to the Church's persecutors. In fact, as often happens in battle, the proselytes were treated unjustly by their enemies and, at times, neglected by their new allies. For instance, it is well known that Ferdinand Brunetière had yearned for the chair of Literature in

the College of France, as the culminating glory of his brilliant professorship and that, because of his conversion, "to the great scandal of university and literary men, this legitimate ambition was defeated by the vehemence of political (and I shall add religious) passions and the pusillanimity of those in public power;"¹ and also that, during the preceding year he was the only one deprived of his chair in the Normal School and left without compensation, the other lecturers being transferred to the Sorbonne. We know, too, that for having indiscreetly advised the Episcopate of France to give the odious Separation Law of 1905 a fair trial, he was openly insulted by being called a "submissionist." Assuredly the author and his cosignataries made a mistake and Pius X was right in not acceding to their desire, but was it not wrong for Catholics to sneer at the champion's good intention? However, do you not think that the testi-

¹ Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, Jan. 1, 1907.

mony rendered by these men to the Catholic Church was brought into bolder relief by the attacks of their enemies and the ingratitude of their friends?¹

III.

This granted, let us see what the testimony is. It will not be difficult to show that the motives prompting this testimony vary to a great extent, in fact in the same proportion that temperaments do. You are familiar with the proverb, "All roads lead to Rome," which, if I mistake not, means to the holiness that consecrates

¹ "Is it not a very remarkable fact . . . that several totally independent and disinterested lay writers who could only expect their course to call forth derision and insults, should publicly confess their return to religious beliefs? (This allusion was to Huysmans, Verlaine, Brunetière and himself.) And is it not a manifest proof that, among the many ruins piled up by the sentimental, philosophical, political and social bankruptcy of this disastrous close of the century, faith continues to stand upright like those imposing cathedrals which, firm upon their foundations after so many hundreds of years, attest the immutable strength of Christianity and the permanence of the Church?" (*La Bonne Souffrance*, by F. Coppée, pp. 223-234.)

Rome in the eyes of the world; and a little reflection upon the different roads traversed by our converts ¹ will convince you that, from all parts no matter how remote, one can and must come back to the Church. It is obvious that "the same side of truth does not appeal to all minds and that religion does not touch all hearts in the same spot. And, although individual, . . . there is not one of these 'human cases' that could not have served as a starting-point for a whole course in apologetics." ²

François Coppée's case ³ is the simplest

¹ "There are many roads that lead to belief." (*Discours de combat*, new series, F. Brunetière, p. 45.) "Classical arguments can have no influence except by becoming *personal certainties* for each one." (M. Lebreton in the *Revue pratique d'Apologétique*, Dec. 1, 1907, p. 344.)

² Brunetière, *ibid.*, pp. 8, 9, 10, note.

³ During the republishing of these pages F. Coppée died in sentiments of the truest piety. His remains were accompanied to the cemetery by thousands of the workingmen of Paris, lowly men of whom he had sung with so much delicacy and pathos. It was a touching triumph which, to me, seemed far superior to the official pomp commanded by Victor Hugo.

of all. In the preface to *La Bonne Souffrance*¹ he has given us an account of the moral revolution by which he was, as it were, flung back into the arms of God. Brought up a Christian, he was fervent until about his fifteenth year; then came the crisis of adolescence and with it, transgressions. Through false shame and fear of the necessary acknowledgments, the young man ceased to practice his religion and, like many others, in an endeavor to excuse himself, explored both reason and science in quest of metaphysical arguments. Pride, which had brought about the beginning of his downfall, kept him for a long time out of the straight, narrow path and furnished him pretexts for authorizing the revolt of his senses. However, ten years ago, God visited him with the saving trial of physical suffering. Illness led him to pause and reflect, for happily he had neither renounced his belief in God and human liberty nor lost his respect for truth, being still sincerely inter-

¹ Lamorre, publisher, 1898.

ested in noble causes. A first surgical operation, performed at Pau, seemed to be successful and Coppée's serious thought fled with vanishing danger, but danger re-appeared and necessitated a still more painful and hazardous operation. Then the poet entered into himself, sent for a priest and went to confession but, because of a Jansenistic scruple, would not receive the Holy Eucharist. However, on the advice of his confessor, he began to pray and to read the Gospels wherein he saw "truth shine like a star" and "palpitate like a heart."¹ Once again his soul became meek and humble like that of a little child, and he recovered the faith of his early days which was legible as "the characters of an ancient manuscript on the parchment of a palimpsest."² Several months later he received Holy Communion and ever after, triumphant and happy, extolled the Catholic Church in which alone, through the humble avowal of one's faults,

¹ Preface to *La Bonne Souffrance*, p. 13.

² *Id.*, *ibid.*, p. 245.

one finds perfect peace and, in the Eucharist the adorable food of the soul. To his friend the sinner, Coppée charitably recommended the remedy that had cured him: "Do as I did. Reopen your Gospels and return to the Cross. Divested of all pride, present yourself at the tribunal founded by Jesus Christ where is enthroned a mercy surpassing our most sublime dreams of justice."¹

Taken all in all, Coppée's experience may be resolved into Chateaubriand's celebrated saying, "I wept and I believed." Nevertheless,—can it be an illusion?—in Coppée's recital I detect the ring of a greater sincerity and a more genuine humility than I find in that of the noted romantic writer.

It was not precisely through physical pain but through the deepest moral distress that Retté, another poet, returned to God. He emerged from his desolation through the intervention of Coppée who

¹ Preface to *La Bonne Souffrance*, p. 260.

had become an apostle of truth regained and who said, as of old Jesus had said to the leper, "Go, show thyself to the priest." Retté went and peace "descended into his soul." The account of his conversion, a recital which he himself claims to be "sincere and scrupulously accurate,"¹ is clothed in pleasing language which, although not classic, is very well adapted—I was about to say almost too well in places, but art alone does not destroy sincerity—and, on the whole, very touching.

Adolphe Retté, born and baptized in the Catholic religion but "reared without faith," was placed in a Protestant college and followed the practices of the Confession of Augsburg, afterwards retaining but a vague theism and an unconquerable dislike for the dryness of the reformed religion. At eighteen he enlisted as a soldier, did . . . everything of which a soldier is capable and, subsequently reëntering civil life, wrote books in which he combined "eroticism with blasphemy."

¹ *Du diable à Dieu*, p. 3. (Léon Vanier, Paris.)

Socialism, Anarchism, Collectivism, Radicalism, orgiastic paganism and a sort of misty Buddhism, each enlisted his passing attention until at length he not only became disgusted with the political men who were his collaborators, but grew to hate Christ more and more with the mysterious hatred that breathes of hell. One day when lecturing at Fontainebleau, he pompously announced that science would usher in the golden age and some workmen gathered around an inn table asked him to define his scientific *Credo* and explain how, without God, the world could have taken shape. Retté stammered a bit, gave random quotations from Lamarek, Darwin, Haeckel, Büchner, Moleschott and even Diderot and, being plied with still more pointed questions, finally admitted that he could not answer. So firm was the confidence of his inquisitors in the great infallible Science that the poor fellows were disturbed but little, if any, but the anguish of doubt entered the lecturer's soul and remained there for three years. He lost faith in science and in progress

and still, through debauchery, the devil kept a tight hold on him, the only decent sentiments left within him being the love of nature and of art. During a stroll in the woods the sublime beauty of one of Dante's passages on the purifying of souls in purgatory, seemed to thrill him¹ and he was confronted by the agonizing question, "Does God exist?" Although he banished the idea, being impelled by some interior force which he now knows to have been diabolical, he was nevertheless constrained to admit that amid the perpetual change in creeds and in human affairs, the Catholic Church remains immutable; that she derives this unique stability from a more than human source and that she alone is the custodian of consoling truth.

He began to pray occasionally, but whilst praying and seeking help from the prayers of others, he again plunged into the abyss of pride and sensuality and, as with Au-

¹ "Appeared to me—may I again behold it!—

A light along the sea so swiftly coming,

Its motion by no flight of wing is equalled; . . ."

Dante's *Purgatory*, Canto II.

gustine in the long ago, a furious conflict between light and darkness went on within his soul; his passions, fearful of dismissal, clinging to him with desperate tenacity. So great was his discouragement during this harrowing struggle that, whilst in Paris, he was seized with the thought of suicide and was on the verge of committing the rash act when he went to see François Coppée who received him with brotherly charity, and inspired him with a little moral energy. Falling ill and being seriously threatened with a hemorrhage, Retté went back to the country where, despite a slight inclination to Catholicism, he wrote a sarcastic article on Huysmans's conversion, apropos of *Les Foules de Lourdes*, and containing blasphemous language against the Blessed Virgin. A pilgrimage to the oratory of Notre-Dame de Grâce, situated on the rock of Cornebiehe in the forest that surrounds Arbome—a journey of which he makes a graceful, although to my way of thinking, an overwrought symbol of the ascent of the soul, via the Calvary of expiation, to Mary the

great comforter—gave him confidence in the Virgin. Nevertheless, pride still reigned supreme in his heart and therefore vanquished him.

I could not fittingly analyze the conflicts by which this poor heart was agitated and in describing which Retté actually brings his good angel and the devil upon the scene and has them speak simultaneously with himself; these touching colloquies must be read to be appreciated. Once again when the unhappy man thought himself abandoned by God, despair seized him and he was about to hang himself but was deterred by an "interior voice" that whispered to him of divine mercy. Then, a glance at the crucifix and another pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Grâce restored peace to his soul. Coppée, whom he had begged to help him, sent him to a Sulpician, just as one would recommend a sick person to a physician, and Retté had the courage to go. He met the Abbé Motet, was instructed by him in the essential truths of religion and in Christian practices, made a general confession and

received Holy Communion. Of this first communion he loved to write, delighting to expatiate upon "the glorious peace that reigned" within him. "Ah!" exclaimed he, "why can we not arrest time at this solemn hour of tranquility and innocence! Why must the world come back to besiege us with its base appetites and vile tumults? . . . O Blessed Eucharist, how greatly to be pitied are the ignorant and the erring who despise Thy efficacy! As for me, I know that Thou art the source of all good and the fountain of hope and energy whence, in days of sadness and discouragement, the soul imbibes comfort and joy. Grant, O my God, that I may never forget this."¹ In solitude he wrote the book in which he relates his struggles, his sufferings and his victory and returns thanks to God: the work is not one of vainglory but of reparation.

From Retté's story you have seen how, in our rationalistic age which boasts of

¹ *Du diable à Dieu*, pp. 197-198.

pinning its faith to naught save science and positive proofs, the invisible world and even mysticism assert their rights. Huysmans neither thinks nor speaks differently from Retté. He says: "We are in darkness, we feel vaguely in and about us struggles that are forever ending and recommencing. The game is played by three: God, the devil and man."¹ . . . And he declares that through mysticism he was brought back to the fold of the Good Shepherd. "My faith rests neither upon my reason (*but here he either makes a mistake or expresses himself inappropriately*) nor upon the more or less positive perception of my senses: it springs from an interior sentiment, from an assurance acquired through internal proofs. With all due respect to those caziques of psychiatry and those would-be pedagogues who, because incompetent to explain anything, classify as *auto-suggestion* or *dementia* the phenomena of the divine life of which they are totally ignorant, mysti-

¹ *Les Foules de Lourdes*, p. 28.

cism is a decidedly accurate science. I have been able to verify a certain number of its effects and this suffices: I ask no more of it in order to believe.”¹

From *Sainte Lydwine, Les Foules de Lourdes, La Cathédrale* and other works, we glean that Huysmans was familiar with the great mystical authors, and his last years and admirable death have shown that he knew how to practice their advice in an heroic degree. However, it was from the most dismal depths of degradation that he soared into the light. I admit that I am incapable and not very desirous of making known to you all the disorders, vagaries and artificiality that at first beset the life of this artist who was not alone a prey to pride and lust but also the dupe of spiritualism, satanism and sadism. Later he humorously remarked: “God can not be hard to please when He

¹ *Id., ibid.* In this study it is not necessary either to ask or to establish to what school of mystics Huysmans belonged: whether to the Flemish or the Spanish rather than to the French, Italian or German. That is beyond the scope of my subject.

is satisfied with the like of me!"¹ God is never hard to please when souls manifest a humble and sincere repentance and this was the case with Huysmans. His experience—which, thank God, is not a very common one—brought him into almost actual touch with the supernatural. Coppée very wittily observed that Huysmans took the longest way of *getting to Rome* and, in summing up the miraculous transformation, added: "Some years ago an unwholesome attraction led him to study the mysterious abominations of Satanism, and on reading successively *Là-bas* and *En Route* one might think—if unaware that the first of these stories is wholly imaginary (*I hope it is; I would like to feel as sure of this as M. Coppée*)—that upon emerging from some *black mass* Durtal, that is Huysmans, fled to the Trappists for

¹ F. Coppée, who quotes this saying, writes very humbly: "And I would add, 'with the like of me.' I have heard this remark laughed at but I to the contrary, find it very touching. However, one should not speak thus as it savors too much of discouragement." (*La Bonne Souffrance*, p. 231.)

refuge. The truth is that this disdainful creature who was in all things so hard to satisfy, and was quite as squeamish in regard to cooking as to style, one day became disgusted with himself. This feeling of self-loathing which he has often expressed with the utmost sincerity, was later on to assume in a scrupulous conscience, the form of repentance. Whosoever repents experiences the need of forgiveness and the one tribunal in which indulgence is infinite and absolution perfect is the confessional. Hence Durtal rushed into Penance — *En Route* devotes singularly touching pages to this soul-stirring crisis—and was subsequently a Christian.” And the Christian was a devoted one. He enjoyed the delights of Gregorian plain chant and the charm of the old Gothic cathedrals as thoroughly as the absorbing power of mysticism; however, owing to the remnant of an old habit, he roundly abused those of his new co-religionists whose artistic sense was not as keen as his own. He even became an Oblate of St. Benedict but, better still, happy in the interior and

supernatural life to be found in the Catholic Church alone, he suffered like a hero and died like a saint, blessed and protected by the Virgin of Lourdes.

Paul Bourget is not a mystic but a philosopher and a sociologist¹ whose observations and reflections have gradually brought him to Catholicism. Prior to the appearance of *Le Disciple*, which seems like the first milestone reached in its author's onward march, there was already distinguishable among the Anglo-Parisian snobs and the decidedly cosmopolitan element that patronized the gilded salons which the novelist enjoyed frequenting, a philosopher who was reaping his harvest of social and consequently Christian truths. In analyzing the passions he discovered the remedies which must be applied to them and, in his autobiography, he wrote: "Having started from a simply positivist point of view, I was driven from psychology to ethics by the same

¹ Cf. *Paul Bourget sociologue*, by Tanerède de Visan. (Nouvelle librairie nationale, 85 Rue de Rennes.)

necessity which, despite all his skepticism, impels the physician who is sure of his diagnosis to question himself concerning a remedy." And now, let us endeavor to make known briefly the steps by which the pupil of Stendhal and Balzac made his ascension,¹ how he finally relinquished skepticism and pessimism or the somewhat brutal realism of his first models and, surpassing Taine, his other master, turned toward a broader, clearer, more inspiring horizon; how he wrote *L'Etape*,

¹ Although not afraid of the word *conversion*, M. Bourget declares that he would prefer another. In *Outre-Mer* he has written: ". . . such is not my particular case. One is converted from a negation and not from a purely expectant attitude. The position of an analyst who is without a doctrine and consequently searching, is but one of the forms of methodical doubt. It would be easy for me to show that if there has been development in my thought there has been no contradiction, and that the second last chapter of *Un Crime d'Amour*, the epilogue to *Mensonges*, twenty passages in *Physiologie*, the last pages of *Le Disciple* and those in the *Cruelle Enigme* dealing with sin and confession, already completely harmonized with what I have since called experimental apologetics." Very well, then, let us speak of development and ascension.

and *Un Divorce*, the latter an especially beautiful book that seeks to defend weak souls against the permanent temptation held out to them by a nefarious law; how he became a good Christian and, in his own way, a soldier of the Church of Jesus Christ.

He himself tells us whence he started. "Science (if you notice, it is *always science!*) renders impossible all belief in the revelation of the supernatural and, at the same time, declares itself powerless to solve the problems which, of old, were solved by Revelation."¹

Such was the antinomy formulated in the beginning by this incredulous but sincere and serious philosopher, friend though he was, of the dilettanti. In an earnest endeavor to settle the point, he discovered that true science is by no means the enemy of the *supernatural*. His method was the *experimental* study of the human soul and of society.

¹ *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*, 1st edition, 1883, p. 82.

On the human soul taken individually.
Is there a better psychology and a more thorough and better regulated system of morality than that of Catholicism which imposes upon the faithful frequent examination of conscience—in fact advises that such be made daily—thus showing “the infinite importance of the moral life” and effectively sustaining the will in its struggle against the passions? Reason, when left unaided, is frequently overcome by the senses and oftentimes even the heart arguments of filial and maternal love can not withstand the great pressure brought to bear upon them. But religion and the Catholic religion only, inflames the heart of the believer with an efficacious, a *supernatural* love and offers him in the Sacraments, those sources of divine grace, a strength that shields him from evil and lifts him up after a fall.¹ “How,” it may be asked, “has Catholicism acquired this profound and accurate knowl-

¹ Cf. *Cruelle énigme, Terre promise, Mensonges* and *passim*.

edge of the soul?" Jesus Christ Himself has imparted it, Jesus Christ Who made the soul and founded Catholicism for the soul's support and elevation. "Still there are philosophers who, although not Catholics, nevertheless lead irreproachable lives as, for instance, Monneron in *L'Etape*." This is true; Monneron and his kind, although few and far between, are good men, "misguided Christians" who proceed in consequence of an acquired speed and, with ideas of justice and solidarity, have set up a religion for themselves. However, the great mass of others, the weak, the impressionable, those who no longer have faith, can do naught else but fall and they fall repeatedly. God is necessary to them.¹ Observe lone philosophy when confronted by passion. It is serious, it adopts a scientific jargon and ultimately furnishes pretexts to him who is ready to yield as, for instance, in the case of Robert Greslou in *Le Disciple*. Besides, unbelievers are usually proud or

¹ "They needed, yes, they needed God." (*L'Etape*.)

sensual men¹ who, at critical junctures, when face to face with death or "in awful moments," reëxperience the religious impulse and with it the need of prayer. In presence of the dead body of his disciple, the victim of his lessons in philosophy, does not old Adrien Sixte, knowing and admitting that he is an accomplice, feel the first words of the divine prayer, "Our Father, Who art in heaven," rise to his lips? Prayer, the instinctive cry of the suffering heart and man's appeal to God, has a "supernatural strength."

On the social soul or, if you will, *on society*. Following Paul Bourget's lead, let us consider only a few of the most distressing social problems.

Take, for example, *divorce* which, in the name of modern principles, has been installed in our latter-day legislation. What are its results? "Fratricidal hate," "murderous blows," and "horrible strife." Do these beget progress?

¹ Darras, Monneron and Robert Greslou in *Un Divorce*, *L'Étape* and *Le Disciple*.

Ah no, they cause a decline, a retrogression; they foster the reign of caprice, of individual fancy. Whilst admitting that superior civilization tends toward monogamy you have nevertheless superseded monogamy by "successive polygamy," pure and simple, and, by tearing its sacred ties asunder, have destroyed the family which, because of its nature, has need of stability. How much more reasonable is the Catholic religion even when considered "from the single viewpoint of mere observation!" Father Euvrard says to Darras: "I thus wished to bring home to you the identicalness between the law of the Church and the law of reality; between the teaching of experience and that of Revelation. In its effort to endure, the social nature ends by adopting the very rule of which Religion has made a dogma."¹

The inequality of social conditions; . . . suffering. As Brunetière says, this is the real social question and upon it philos-

¹ *Un Divorce.*

ophers outside the Church, most especially socialists, preach the two magic themes: "universal happiness" and "absolute justice." Unfortunately this doctrine "is framed at variance with the genuine laws of social order, . . . two of them, verified from the beginning of time, being inequality and suffering." These laws were completely ignored by the French Revolution which, at the same time whetted two of men's aspirations "likewise verified throughout the ages, namely: justice and happiness." Here again, how much more clear-sighted is Christianity! When endeavoring to encourage the poor man, the Christian does not lie to him by saying: "you are or will be my equal," but declares: "I am your fellow-creature." Thus, by charity, the practice of which is a Christian's duty, he assists his poor fellow-being without, however, humiliating him.¹ Admirable economy of Religion which alone can thus prop up the social edifice! And whence comes this power? Evidently from God.

¹ *L'Étape.*

Arrived at this stage of his experimental proofs, it was hardly necessary for our philosopher to dissipate a few other doubts on the relations of science and faith, in order to realize that these have two different domains and that science can in no wise satisfy the religious needs of the soul; nor was it imperative for him to clear up the solvable difficulties of exegesis. He understood thoroughly and had but one more step to take, namely, to believe; so, with God's assistance, he took it and adopted Catholicism, the only religion whose precepts conform to the teachings of experience. His Catholicism is therefore "born of a realistic vision of the moral nature." Being absolutely sincere, Paul Bourget has made his deeds comply with his beliefs.

I may be wrong in my estimate of this matter and yet I wonder if you will not agree with me that, as we proceed with this study, the horizon seems to broaden and the apologetic effort, so conspicuous in the lives and writings of each of the new

recruits, to assume a greater importance? Of course Brunetière's endeavor is by far the most original and animated. Unfortunately he could not complete the *Apologie* that he had dreamed of building and the plan of which he sketched for a friend one day when "marvelous in didactic verve, persuasive vigor and constructive skill,"¹ as indeed he often was. It was a beautiful structure, joyfully begun but interrupted by death; however, great portions of its walls still stand as a terrible menace to some contemporary error.² M. J. Cartier endeavored to draw up this plan anew in the *Revue pratique d'Apologétique*³ and succeeded in making an ingenious and imposing reconstruction; but because not engaged in a critical study, he neglected to indicate the gaps, crevices and weak points in the work as also, although M. Brunetière did not care to acknowl-

¹ *Ferdinand Brunetière*, Notes and souvenirs by Victor Giraud (Bloud et Cie), p. 28, note.

² *Pendent opera interrupta minacque Murorum ingentem . . .* (Virg.)

³ March 15, April 1, April 15 and May 1, 1907.

edge it, a certain inclination toward *fideism*.¹ However, what interests us just at present is not so much the *Apologie* itself as the path that led the writer up to it.

This was indeed a long one but very remarkable and paved with most instructive information. Thinkers and friends who have been intimately associated with Brunetière will give us a detailed account of what, like Newman and Manning, the author was pleased to style his religious evolution rather than his conversion.² Still, call it what you will, conversion or religious evolution, the word matters little,

¹ Cf. *Discours de combat*, new series, pp. 20-23. Cf. *Science et Religion*. His horror of "philosophy" made him declare that God is not demonstrable, that He is an object of belief, not of "science." Nor shall we speak of his explanation of *symbolism*.

² To M. Trogan, who had expressed the same idea, Brunetière wrote: "I thank you, especially in the name of fair-minded readers, for having insisted on otherwise designating what some are pleased to call my *conversion*, and which certainly is one although it is also something else. . . ." M. Trogan had alluded to it as an *éclosion*, meaning thereby a sort of a development—manifestation. (*Correspondent*, Dec. 25, 1906.)

what concerns us most is to learn how the change took place.

M. Victor Giraud was certainly right¹ in applying to the eminent writer and thinker what he, in turn, had said of the nineteenth century: "It may be supposed to have been agitated by other cares and, in fact, it was; but if the religious question was not always the first and most manifest of its preoccupations, it was certainly the most unremitting and although at times the least obtrusive, on the other hand, the most torturing." In fact, from his college days or, not to go back so far, from the time when, as private tutor in a "boîte à bachot,"² he began to acquire universal knowledge by giving all kinds of lessons in literature, history, philosophy

¹ Work already quoted. (Bloud et Cie) pp. 24-25. I have taken it as a guide in the following lines and I thank him cordially for the pages he has written on this subject. Cf. also *Ferdinand Brunetière*, by Georges Fonsegrive (Bloud et Cie).

² L'Institution Lelarge which M. Bourget calls "the humble shelter of our young ambitions" because of the fact that he had worked there for thirty-three months with P. Brunetière. (*Le Temps*, Dec. 11, 1906.)

and the sciences, particularly mathematics, his restless, I was about to say Alcestian, pessimistic soul, was tormented by the same problem that disturbed Pascal's, the religious problem that "has not ceased to be that which every thinking being broaches, discusses and solves, at least once in his lifetime."¹ In the varied and eminently instructive articles that he began to write as early as 1873,² whether he discussed literature, language, art, history or philosophy, his serious mind was

¹ *De quelques travaux récents sur Pascal*, p. 30 of *Etudes critiques*, 3rd series, by F. Brunetière. The article was written in September, 1885. In 1900 he repeated with still greater precision: "Do we or do we not believe that God became incarnate in the Person of Him Who called Himself the Son of God? . . . It is here that at least once in our lifetime we should all without exception, answer . . ." (*Discours de combat*, new series, p. 42.) And, in 1905, in the Preface to the Abbé Picard's work on the *Transcendance de Jésus-Christ*, he said: "The religious question is the foundation or, so to speak, at the bottom of all others and there is but one religious question which is precisely that of the 'transcendence of Christianity.'" (pp. xiv-xv.)

² First, in the *Revue politique et littéraire* and then in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*.

ever haunted by the religious idea which permeated nearly all his works, cropping out in all shapes and in the most unexpected places. Occasionally he would hurl an angry remark at the Church and at Christian dogma in the name of the very science and criticism to which he was later on to mete out their just deserts; but nowhere is there any banter after the fashion of that found in Renan or Anatole France: an Alcestris could not be a dilettante! His indefatigable and insatiable curiosity preferred to gratify itself along the line of religious books, either Catholic or Protestant, and he read not only Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Pascal, Port-Royal, Fénelon, Massillon, Calvin and Vinet but the best works by theologians of our own day, Perrone and Franzelin . . . ; he even studied the *Summa* of St. Thomas Aquinas and I venture to say that not many laymen, nor indeed priests, among us have done as much. He was passionately devoted to religious history, especially to works on the origin of Christianity; for instance, those by Havet,

Renan and Burnouf. . . . He acknowledged to M. Giraud that the *Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme* by Eugène Burnouf had retarded his espousal of Catholicism fifteen years.¹ In philosophy he was for a long time under the influence of Auguste Comte, Darwin, Herbert Spencer and even Schopenhauer and, until the very last, highly approved of Comte and Darwin. True indeed are those words of the popular song: "One always goes back to one's first love," for you know that, once converted, Brunetière desired to utilize in religion the Positivism of Comte—notwithstanding the disfavor of fellows in philosophy—and, in literature, the Darwinian theory on evolution. But prior to his conversion he searched the same current of ideas to see if Positivism could not found a system of morality that would take the place of vanished religions; besides, you are aware that the philosopher, although having become a Catholic, nevertheless retained as a good

¹ *Ferdinand Brunetière*, p. 26.

Positivist and a loyal disciple of that conscientious *savant* Claude Bernard, a love of *fact*, and showed by facts that if the social question is a moral one it is impossible to separate morality from religion and that the moral question is therefore a religious question. Meanwhile, before his visit to the Vatican, that is to say, during the twenty years of literary production between 1873 and 1894, he was taking soundings, was enlightening himself through extensive reading, through the comparative study of religions, especially the Christian religions, Greek, Protestant and Catholic, and even questioning heaven and earth. However, when seeking to establish morality and social morality, he had seen that science and philosophy could not guarantee it, that such an achievement belonged to Catholicism only.¹ Heaven hearkened to this sincere thinker and ardent lover of truth and responded by diffusing a daily increasing

¹ He repeated this idea in 1905 in the Preface to the Abbé Picard's book (pp. xi-xiv).

light which shone its brightest on the occasion of his trip to Italy in 1894. "Whatever else may have been said of it, it was simply a pleasure trip taken to gratify curiosity";—Brunetière thus expressed himself in an unpublished memorandum containing an account of his interview with Leo XIII, a note that certainly ought to be published some day.¹ At any rate, the trip culminated in a visit to the Vatican. The impression made by the "grand old man's" speech and bearing was deep indeed; in fact it was what first spurred Brunetière to overcome the moral vacillation undoubtedly engendered, as always happens in such cases, by the thousand and one minor events occurring in the interior and subconscious life. We know the rest.²

First of all came the article that followed the visit. It was a well aimed blow at the self-infatuated science that failed to

¹ It was published by M. Victor Giraud in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, April 1, 1908.

² *Ferdinand Brunetière*, p. 27.

keep exorbitant promises. "The time is not long gone by when scholarly incredulity was commonly considered a mark or proof of superiority of intellect and strength of mind. . . ." ¹ His style revealed a splendidly controlled eloquence but at intervals was seriously and bitingly ironical. At a celebrated banquet Marcellin Berthelot protested in the name of science; and, without any banquet, certain theologians protested for other reasons than M. Berthelot's.

Then, both during and after these noisy controversies came Ferdinand Brunetière's conquest of Catholicism in its entirety, which is at once a belief and a rule of life.

He assumed the offensive against those who had "a hatred of truth." On May 1, 1895, he contributed to the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, an article entitled *La*

¹ *Après une visite au Vatican in Questions actuelles*, by F. Brunetière, p. 3. The article appeared in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, Jan. 1, 1895, the visit having taken place Nov. 27, 1894. I do not need to sum up the campaign that followed.

Moralité de la doctrine évolutive, wherein he proved that ethics can not be deduced from nature, such as it is; at Besançon, February 2, 1896, he delivered a great lecture on *La Renaissance de l'idéalisme* which, for him, was like reaching the first milestone on the road; and in the same year he wrote a preface to Mr. Balfour's book: *The Foundations of Belief*. In this preface he acknowledged that mere science is incapable of demonstrating the conception of the Absolute and the Unknowable and that science can only be surpassed by belief or faith.

During the Congress of Besançon he gave a magnificent lecture, November 19, 1898, in the Kursaal, on the *Besoin de Croire* (Necessity of believing) a necessity which is innate in all men. He did not deem that he had the right to proceed further, it being with him he said a question of personal candor and dignity, and he concluded thus: "No one of us is master of the interior work being accomplished in souls. . . . And if this be a truly great step, why should I not some day take an-

other and more decisive one?" At a banquet that evening, when responding to a toast, he said: "I shall give way to truth."¹

On November 18, 1900, at the twenty-seventh Congress of the Catholics of the department of Nord, held in Lille, its capital, he developed the *actual*—and eternal, philosophical, historical—*reasons for believing*. Thus was a still more decisive step taken. "Perhaps," he said, "I may be asked now as I have often been asked before: 'What do you believe, you who speak thus?' . . . What do I *believe*? . . . Not what do I *suppose, imagine, know* or *understand* but what do I *believe*? . . . Go to Rome and inquire!" Thenceforth Brunetière was a Roman Catholic because

¹ One who heard him writes: "We knew this to be one of those great moments which, of themselves, make it worth while to have lived. . . . When finally M. Brunetière said: 'Gentlemen, my only merit lay in having given way to truth', he disclosed to us the serenity of an upper sky, the open sky of conscience and the soul. These simple words were a dazzling revelation. (*Ferdinand Brunetière*, by Georges Fonsegrive, pp. 30-31.)

he had concluded that Catholicism only could satisfy his need of faith and furnish him with motives of credibility.

At length came humble Christian practice—which, however, was not quite complete¹—and its principal or public fruit was to be his work on *Catholic* apologetics, “a synthetic structure of three stories,” only a part of which he was able to finish, namely, the *Utilisation du positivisme*.² For our contemporaries, Brunetière's apology would have been perhaps not as agreeable as Pascal's but possibly more convincing in favor of Catholic truth, if it be a fact that Pascal, having strangely deviated from his first idea in consequence of events with which he became identified, would have used his pro-

¹ His death occurred at 10 a. m. on Dec. 9, 1906. “He had heroically awaited the sinister visitor who, to use the Biblical expression, nevertheless ‘came like a thief’ and surprised him at the very moment when, in full consciousness, he was preparing to discharge those duties which open up the horizon of Christian hope.” (*Ferdinand Brunetière*, by Georges Fonsegrive, p. 43.)

² The two others were *Les difficultés de croire* and *La Transcendance du Christianisme*.

jected apology preëminently to prove the truth of Jansenism and to defend Port-Royal against its enemies.¹

In Brunetière's case the conquest of truth was indeed a brilliant one although not achieved without a mighty effort. And here I would again quote the lines: "If final adherence was not given without a struggle nor without difficulty — particularly in regard to the Abbé Loisy's books — ² it was nevertheless given honestly and

¹ The Jansenism of Pascal's *Pensées* in *Moralistes et poètes*, by Maurice Souriau, pp. 3-42 (published by Vuibert et Nony, Paris). Cf. *Études sur le XVII^e siècle*, by Father Loughaye, S.J.

² In November, 1900, he made this disclosure: "Exegesis, the conquests of exegesis, the distant, deep and attractive horizons which exegesis opens up to us, all this, Gentlemen, made up the joy and the torture of my youth. I believed — perhaps you remember the expression used by Renan — 'in the science of the products of the human mind;' with great avidity I read and re-read Dr. Strauss's *Life of Christ* and, in the *Lotus de la bonne loi* I thought to come once more upon the Gospels. Taking the word of those who were not versed in Hebrew, I came near believing in the 'modernity of the prophets,' and, on the testimony of those who had no knowledge of Greek, I admitted that the truth of the mysteries depended upon an interpolation in a verse of

completely and perhaps he (Brunetière) had all the more merit in giving and maintaining it because, as he sometimes acknowledged, if, in Catholicism, he found great mental satisfaction and the 'appeasement of his (intellectual) anxiety', deep heart contentment was always denied him and it was for this that he would have cared most." I have introduced these lines not only to bring the champion's merit into a stronger light but also the better to emphasize the gracious, superior and convincing homage which Catholicism received through the surrender of such a vigorous, masterful intellect.

In giving these testimonies, especially

St. John. However, meanwhile I have reflected—as, in what other way would a man who is interested only in ideas use his existence?—and I have seen that whilst eluding the real question, exegesis nevertheless remained in itself a commendable science although it did not and could not probe the heart of things." (*Discours de combat*, new series, pp. 38-39.) Beneath the author's irony and slightly paradoxical mode of expression, we detect the true spirit of the writer and the Christian. Nevertheless, one of these days it will be very interesting to know what troubles the wicked *little book* bred within him.

that of Brunetière, I might have entered more into detail but I feel that I have said enough for the purpose in view. We have seen that of these five writers who have come back to the faith and who were all men of spirit and intelligence, there was not one, no matter what his physical or moral distress, who did not first feel within himself the need of a religion and did not seek to satisfy this need elsewhere than in the Catholic Church. Whilst admitting this to be true, you may bring up the case of Taine who also was on the road to truth but died without having quite reached the goal and who, although born a Catholic, wished to be interred according to the Protestant rite, and you may maintain that the final decision of this upright man defeats my careful argumentation.—Not at all. By making such a request Taine did not intend to proclaim his allegiance to the Protestant Church; he desired religious burial that sectarians might not be gratified and Christians scandalized, which they surely would have been, had he received atheistical inter-

ment. On the other hand, not having entirely renewed his allegiance to the Catholic faith, he did not wish to simulate sentiments and a belief which, as yet, he did not share. If he tarried by the way-side or rather had not time to enter the promised land towards which he seemed to be journeying, the reason is known to God alone. The others whom I have mentioned, having corresponded with the grace offered to all, were *certainly* happier and *probably*—I shall not say *certainly* because we are here in the depths of mystery—more courageous, more obedient, more strongly imbued with the spirit of prayer and with humility. . . .¹

¹ Why should I not here again quote Brunetière? He said of Auguste Comte who was somewhat wanting in the humility necessary for the taking of the last step: "The lack of humility is, you know, what alas, may be called *the great heresy of modern times*; and if, accurately speaking, every heresy is but the development of the original vice of human nature (cf. Godefroid Kürth in *Les Origines de la civilisation*) the distinguishing vice of this, our age, is pride; in fact it has been characteristic of the last four or five centuries. All that we have retained of *Genesis* is the saying of the serpent: *Et eritis sicut Dii.*" (*Discours de combat*, 1st

IV.

François Coppée, Adolphe Retté, Joris-Karl Huysmans, Paul Bourget and Fer-

series, pp. 338-339, *Le besoin de croire*.) May it not be said that even before Brunetière became an out-and-out Christian (1898) these true, significant words of his stigmatized *modernism* at least in its principal cause? Later, his faith being whole, he justly attacked the method of *immanence*: “. . . to the method of ‘immanence’ you courageously oppose the objective method of demonstration which remains the good or perhaps the only one and to which, in any event, the former would serve merely as an introduction and a preparation.” (Preface to the Abbé Picard’s book, p. VI.) Hence it would be sovereignly unjust to rank him with *immanentists* or *subjectivists* either as regards method or simply tendency. I have already spoken of his *fideism* but there is more reason to classify as a *pragmatist*, one who has so strongly insisted upon the *need to believe*. . . . “First of all we must live; life is neither contemplation nor speculation but action.” (*Après une visite au Vatican*.) However, pragmatism can here be understood in a good sense. For F. Brunetière, religion was not an inexplicable aspiration towards the infinite, a vague sentiment or an abstract idea (cf. the article *Fâcheuse Equivoque* in which he tells M. Auguste Sabatier the unvarnished truth) but a combination of dogmas and practices clearly defined by Rome. Be it said, if you will, that there was some affinity between this vigorous thinker who wished to *utilize* Positivism in favor of the Catholic religion, and William James; however, it were better not to lay too much stress on this comparison.

dinand Brunetière, although neither starting from the same point nor following the same route, nevertheless reached a common goal; therefore, all these conversions are unquestionably “individual cases.” Truth, which is one and undivided, has various aspects and each of its innumerable phases rouses certain intellects and touches certain hearts in some special way or at some particular time. However, as Brunetière has very justly observed, these individual cases “nevertheless have a general purport for the reason that ‘no motive of credibility’ can exist, so to speak, outside the plan of Christianity”: therefore they can “be used as a starting-point for an entire course in Apologetics.”

Indeed, even if we restrict ourselves to the “cases” that have come under our notice, it is evident that while suffering, vice, injustice, and social inequality, as also noble souls enamored of the ideal, continue to be found upon this earth, there will be occasion to urge upon men the power and fecundity of the Catholic Church, as it is she who holds out to all

alike, the learned and the ignorant, the philosophical and the unsophisticated, true consolation in time of trial; courage to rise after a fall; that divine charity which alone can heal the wounds of the social body; a deep psychology; the only moral code that is efficacious; as likewise the beauty of her liturgy and the touching truth of her mystical theology. What happens to-day confirms the lessons of yesterday. It were vain for unbelievers to claim that this Church is worn out, that she has had her day. Conversions, which are occurring in an endless chain, are the living proof that the serious-minded and honest-hearted will always have *actual reasons* for believing her dogmas, practicing her morality and having recourse to her Sacraments.

However, these converts who have turned to God "with all their heart" and who, when lecturing or writing of their new convictions, do so with unmistakable sincerity, have not been fortunate in winning complete approbation. Yet does not universal experience teach us that it is

impossible to satisfy every one? These men have encountered all sorts of opponents; some among their new brethren and, as might be expected, others among our enemies.

In fact, it must be acknowledged, and not without regret, that Catholics have not been unanimous in congratulating themselves upon the advent of the vigorous helpers sent by God. This may be accounted for by the dread of a fresh imposition. Once or twice within the last twenty years, our good faith has been so rudely shocked that it behooves us to be on our guard and, according to Christ's recommendation, to unite the wisdom of the serpent to the simplicity of the dove: *the children of light*, whether justly or not, will never be as vigilant concerning terrestrial things as the children of this world. But although the wise should have surrendered to truth, some of them have persevered in their skepticism for a reason not wholly to their credit. In the lives or writings of these recent converts they have found certain acts or sayings which

have impressed them unfavorably and for which they could not or would not make allowances. They have simply forgotten that conversion is not synonymous with perfection, and that old habits are not to be overcome nor new ones to be acquired in a day. It is far easier to discover the mote in our brother's eye than to see the beam in our own. How much more admirable was the method adopted by a certain professor in dealing with a young confrère. One evening the former called across the partition that separated their two rooms: "My friend, I congratulate you." "On what, pray?" "On winding your alarm clock so faithfully every night." "But I disobey it almost every morning by remaining in bed, so I don't deserve your praise." "Ah! but your perseverance will soon be rewarded." We should always practice this same charity, or rather justice, by going forward with outstretched arms to greet those who come to us from afar. But, because Ferdinand Brunetière was still the victim of great "anxiety and of

a sharp, violent, even tragic pessimism ”;¹ because he continued to use the chiding, critical tone which he had sometimes assumed against theologians and the clergy; because his mental habits differed from ours; or else because his religious life, led so humbly and unobtrusively, was not as brilliant as his political life, there was a hue and cry against him and, despite his most solemn affirmation, the sincerity of his conversion was questioned. I have already mentioned the incident of his Letter to the Bishops and how, in consequence, he was called “ submissionist,”² being deeply wounded by the epithet notwithstanding the fact that the disputations are accustomed to take these liberties with one another. Moreover, think of all that was said about Huysmans! Thank God he had banished from his heart the demon of pride and lust and his soul had been transfigured but, if I may so express it, his mind

¹ I admit that, without any disparagement, M. Victor Giraud (*op. cit.*, p. 25) applies these words to the religious thinker.

² He was also called the “green cardinal”.

was tormented by the literary demon which, although less dangerous than the other, embittered his artistic sense, drove his realism to excess and gave to his pen a peevish, sarcastic turn, thus leading the converted author, whose nature was not yet fully subdued, to rebuke not only the allies whom he had just abandoned and who were sometimes contemptible, but likewise his new co-religionists whose virtue was insufficient to conceal their faults and weaknesses. These men were sorely piqued and, instead of closing their eyes, they doubted the sincerity of the Christian, sneered at his "equivocal" attitude and talked of literary exploitation. His intimate friends, unanimous in attesting the purity, simplicity and candor of his faith, have revealed to us how acutely he suffered from this obstinate malevolence. If, during his dreadful illness, any one would remark how touching was his resignation, he was wont quietly to reply: "I hope that this time they'll not say it's *literature*."¹

¹ *Revue Augustinienne*, Oct. 15, 1907, p. 360.

His old self was not quite dead; but then we can never succeed in wholly annihilating our baser nature. God undoubtedly permits these, the most trying of all sufferings, that the souls of His new Christians may be purified to a still greater degree.

However, Huysmans's former allies were shrewder. Irritated by conversions such as his, which defeated their plans and turned the tide of victory in the enemy's favor, they sought to further involve matters by chiming in with certain Catholics, their real tactics being, as always, to explain the case from a human viewpoint and thereby disparage the conversion, thus lessening as much as possible the brilliant homage received from it by the Catholic Church. And this is perfectly fair play. In the *Revue pratique d'Apologétique* M. Henry Gaillard has referred to M. Sageret's book¹ on four of the *littérateurs* whom I have selected for the subject of this study; to his ironical title, *Les Grands*

¹ December 1, 1906, pp. 308-313.

Convertis; to the perfidious skill with which the quotations are either strung together or mutilated; to the purpose apparent everywhere and to the jests introduced in lieu of argument. I shall guard against a repetition of these merited accusations, desiring merely to lay stress upon two points into which the anti-clerical writer seems to have injected more venom than into his other assertions. I find them in his *Preface* and *Conclusion* where he talks on all manner of questions¹ but jumbles them as if with the deliberate intention of rendering even the simplest and clearest of them complicated and obscure; in my opinion it is this very trickery that constitutes his greatest skill.

In the beginning of his treatise he puts a question which, at first glance, reveals the attitude he has assumed and persists in maintaining, and bespeaks a smouldering anger against the Church. "What

¹ The *Syllabus*, Loisyism, hell, the conflict between religion and science, the separation of Church and State, tradition, the United States and a hundred other subjects.

madness, then," he asks, "impels the Church and democracy, or at least the democratic party, to fight incessantly?"¹ The question is badly formulated, although doubtless designedly so and with a view to embittering the debate, as I am not aware that the Church has ever exhibited any *madness*, I shall not say against democracy but against the democratic party: she merely defends herself against the unjustified attacks made upon her and it grieves her to be obliged to do so. However, I accept the question thus formulated. The author adds that, to understand and answer this question, it is necessary to interrogate the *great converts of the hour*, and he maintains that the result of such an inquiry shows the conflict between Catholicism and democracy to be both *doctrinal* and *historic*,

¹ It were perhaps well to remind the English reader that, in monarchical Europe, a sinister meaning attaches to the word *democracy* and to its derivatives—a meaning quite foreign to that understood by those who are not influenced by monarchical ideas—and that such sinister meaning pervades European philosophy, politics and literature. (Translator's note.)

that is to say, founded upon doctrine and facts.

It is doctrinal. As was to be expected, M. Sageret sings the well-known tune. The democratic party is free-thought; and free-thought, be it well understood, is *Reason* and *Science*. On the contrary, Religion, the Catholic Church, is faith, dogma *blindly* imposed upon the intellect and upon reason. "The free-thinker has the advantage because he has reason and science entirely at his disposal (!)¹ whereas the believer *partly* deprives himself of their assistance in order to obey the very dogmas that he is called upon to defend."² For a long time religion has been said to be opposed to science and reason, and I am almost grateful to M. Sageret for being so generous as to admit that we Catholics can use our reason even *in part*. Thus have he and his free-thinking brethren settled the matter and it would

¹ The exclamation point is inserted as much to emphasize the language as the idea.

² *Les Grands Convertis*, p. 241.

perhaps be useless to remind them of these words of Ferdinand Brunetière: "What shall we do? Certainly we will not sacrifice science, much less our independence of thought. If we do not admit that science can replace religion . . . neither do we admit that religion is opposed to science. Indeed, the Church demands this of no one" ¹ To believe in the Church is not to sacrifice one's reason but simply to provide it with a guard-rail that will prevent it from falling into the abyss: dogma "restrains without enslaving us." It might be more expedient to repeat that we do not believe without motives; and even—as was said by M. de Lapparent, a mas-

¹ Because, if well directed and without bias or prejudice, science could not be contradictory to religious truth. It is nevertheless true that method, no matter how perfect, is not practically infallible. Again, on the other hand, science may help to support Catholic dogma, and history to furnish dogmatic facts. F. Brunetière admitted this and hence readily acknowledged that science and faith, although having two distinct domains, can not be completely isolated from each other. In any event, without enslaving either reason or science, faith affords them "a salutary protection against the caprices of individual fancy."

ter whom M. Sageret will perhaps not challenge — that we are proud to place these motives under the “protection of the great names of science, remembering that those who have most honored it, Kepler, Paschal, Newton, Ampère, Cauchy, Hermite and Pasteur, never dreamed that their discoveries could be in any way responsible for weakening the strong convictions by which they felt themselves animated.”¹

However, by way of condemning it, M. Sageret calls attention to the change of tactics introduced into the defense by Paul

¹ *Science et Apologétique*, p. 301. M. de Lapparent's was itself one of those great names of science. I, in my turn, am happy to add it to those he has mentioned and to salute, in death, the conscientious scholar and eminent professor who was the glory of our Catholic Institutes. In reply to an inquiry M. de Lapparent wrote: “I take pleasure in stating that not only was my faith as a Catholic no drawback to my scientific researches but that with an unflinching intellectual and moral consolation I gathered, in the particular centre where my activity was exercised, a great deal of encouragement which was a powerful help to me in the fulfilment of my tasks as a man of science.” (*Revue pratique d'Apologétique*, June 15, 1906, pp. 271-272.)

Bourget and Ferdinand Brunetière. He says that to-day one no longer seeks to establish the basic proof of faith and that the miracle of Christ's resurrection is not dwelt upon nor brought forward as a proof as it was by the Apostles. The new converts have made a "deflection." They go to religion via *social utility*. "No society without ethics; no ethics without religion; consequently, for us Frenchmen, religion is Catholicism. . . ." Hence, to sum up present religious polemics from the doctrinal point of view, we must needs imagine a rather discourteous dialogue. "Thou stubborn fool!" says the anti-clerical to the Catholic. "Criminal!" replies the Catholic to the anti-clerical, "criminal who destroyest society so as to amuse thy brain and satisfy thy baser instincts!" Thus Catholicism is no longer a religion but a *sociology*. M. Sageret considers the situation a formidable one. The new apologists refuse to take up the fight on any other ground than that of social discipline. . . .

This is a manifest falsehood. It is true

that, in the work which Ferdinand Brunetière began, he had developed, as M. Giraud said, "only the first stage on the road to belief" and M. Giraud himself had followed the same order when he studied social morality on his way to the conquest of faith. However, Brunetière's *Apologie* was not to end there. He was openly to attack the *difficulties of believing*, that is to say, *actual* difficulties, the scientific, philosophical, historical and exegetical objections raised against Revelation and also against the *universal, immutable* but nevertheless *progressive* and *infallible* Church. . . . Here and there¹ he had already outlined the principal among those solutions that he wished to give and finally, in the third and last stage of his great work, he was to prove the *transcendency, the divinity of the Christian religion.*² In what, then, I ask, is there "a deflection" from traditional apolo-

¹ *Discours de combat, Questions actuelles* and *Cinq lettres sur Ernest Renan* . . .

² Cf. the *Preface* to the Abbé Picard's book and *La Transcendance de Jésus-Christ*.

getics? I see in all this merely the adaptation of the defense to the needs of the present time. Moreover, Ferdinand Brunetière was brave enough to enter the struggle on no matter what ground, being sufficiently well-equipped and well-informed to give pertinent and convincing answers on all points, which is, of course, the rôle of an apologist.

We are also reminded that Ferdinand Brunetière and Paul Bourget said: "Science and religion are upon two different levels!" and M. Sageret claims that this will remain a daring assertion whilst the Church continues to maintain her present attitude towards history. To believe that Christ rose physically; that, by His miracles, He really violated the laws of nature and that a virgin brought forth a son, is certainly to oppose science. When there is question of these facts, one is obliged to choose between science and religion so long as religion will attribute to them an historic reality or science will preserve the principle of the permanence of facts. This conflict is positively irre-

ducible. . . . A good solution would therefore be that of the Abbé Loisy who, in the name of *subjectivist* philosophy, wished "to establish dogmas and historic research in two absolutely separate domains" and who likewise maintained that the truth in dogma could be falsehood in history: branded as a heretic to-day one might be orthodox to-morrow!

To this, Brunetière had replied in advance by declaring that such a philosophy rests upon a gratuitously affirmed principle, to wit: the denial of the supernatural. "They refuse," said he, "to believe in Christ's resurrection because an historian can not believe in the resurrection of one dead, because a philosopher can not admit any derogation from the laws of nature, and because, if a scholar knows anything with certainty it is that a mortal man never rose from the dead." In his turn he very sensibly added: "The true answer is that the denial of the supernatural in history is, to all appearances, the denial of the law of history, and the denial of the supernatural in nature is,

without the shadow of a doubt, the denial of the liberty of God."¹ Besides, history merely has to register facts that have been duly established by testimony, but the Church can not mix with these a gratuitous principle of Kantian or naturalistic metaphysics, as did the Abbé Loisy, without contradicting reason itself as well as the "law of history." Hence the "conflict" is irreducible only for those who deny the existence of God. Indeed, for such as admit this existence, science and history are as powerless to discredit the miracle as is exegesis to discredit Revelation. . . .

However, the conflict is also *historic*, that is to say, *social* and *political*. In France the Church antagonizes the masses. She is inclined "to become *in part* (here again M. Sageret prudently keeps a loophole of escape!) a religion of the classes." Does not J. K. Huysmans declare that "present day Catholicism flatters the rich

¹ *Les difficultés de croire*, in the last series of the *Discours de combat*, pp. 212-214.

and despises the poor?" According to Paul Bourget, the principal advantage of "the traditional religion of France, lies in its being the ever ready support of an aristocratic leading class." The same holds true in politics. "It is quite a well-known fact that for seventy years past the vastly greater part of French Catholic opinion has always been more or less anti-republican or anti-parliamentarian. Its representatives sit on the Right: at most, only a few will risk themselves in the Centre. Even before the reign of the *Bloc*, hardly any Catholics were seen either amongst the Socialists or the old Opportunists. Moreover, the *Dreyfus Case* (it had to come!) showed Catholics banded together for an interest other than that of their faith. . . ."

Of course "our converts are the fruit and the expression of this Catholic movement." Our adversaries labor arduously to furnish proofs of this assertion, and strange though these proofs be, we shall here reproduce them. All four converts are Academicians, M. Huysmans be-

ing of the Goncourt Academy. All four are of the bourgeoisie: not one of our *great* converts finds favor with the proletariat. All belong to the Opposition: Paul Bourget is a Royalist and, if the other three are Republicans, "the present Republic does not excite their enthusiasm!" Besides, you know on what side all four were ranged in the *Dreyfus Case*. Surely, then, the Church has no occasion to boast of these new recruits who are rather ill-fitted to promote her interests among the lower classes.

Is there any explanation of this Catholic movement, any cause for it? "Yes, tradition . . . Our converts are all enthusiastic adherents of tradition and, for them, the great strength of Catholicism lies in tradition. . . . To tradition, and to it alone, is due democracy's hostility to the Church . . . Catholicism bears a deep imprint of the old régime; it remains *reactionary* . . . If circumstances have separated it from the corpse of royalty, the odor of the latter still clings to it. Its monarchical instincts continue firm even in

its acceptance of the Republic; in fact, most Catholics abandon the old parties only to go over to *Nationalism*."—Here M. Sageret invokes Paul Bourget who is "more clear-sighted than his confrères when, in the name of Science, he separates Catholicism from democracy, for him, Science being *Tradition!*"¹ It was really difficult for M. Sageret to use the other three to this end.

As to the *remedy*, what time has done time will, perhaps, undo. Unfortunately our illustrious converts are not seeking a solution of the difficulty when they make a social affair of religion; neither is Pius X when, by his definition of private property, he forbids Catholics to hold collectivist opinions; and neither is the Con-

¹ M. Sageret alludes to the tragic dialogue between Crémieu-Dax and Jean Monneron. To the latter, who has just been converted, Crémieu-Dax the socialist cries: "Dare maintain that you are scientifically a Catholic!"—"Scientifically, yes!" replies Jean and, in spite of what M. Sageret says, into this adverb, he puts more than tradition, he injects his own *individual experience*, together with social experience. (*L'Étape*, p. 509.)

gregation's Law when, by destroying the *confessional*, *i. e.* Christian schools of the lower classes and allowing those of the bourgeoisie to exist, it reduces "the Catholic clientele" to a little more than half of the bourgeoisie. . . .

Conclusion: "If we are right in taking the struggle between religion and democracy seriously, we might perhaps subject ourselves to superfluous nervous disorders by taking it tragically." It is thus that, after the fashion of Anatole France, M. Sageret drops a curtsy to his readers and retires.

Must he himself be "taken seriously" and receive an answer to all his confused arguments in which I acknowledge that an ounce of truth is sometimes lost in a jumble of errors? It will be understood that I say nothing of politics because the political question is a burning one with which I have forbidden myself to meddle. Moreover, instead of entering deeply into the social question, I shall content myself with a few concise remarks, not by way of defending the Church—for, in so do-

ing I would exceed the limitations of this work—but of putting our “ converts ” in a just light.

It seems to me perfectly legitimate that Paul Bourget should interest himself in the “ leading classes ”—as their abuse by our democrats has been quite sufficient to arouse the concern of a writer—and if needs be, reprimand the *people* who now hold the reins of government. And why should these take umbrage? The mightiest and most majestic king of the old régime bore the severe admonitions of Bossuet and Bourdaloue with great patience and wherefore, just because he is a Catholic, should M. Bourget be censured even for his “ reactionary ” opinions? Have we ever accused free-thought of criminality because of the “ monarchical ideas ” entertained by M. Maurras, one of its adherents, who is in the same political camp as M. Bourget? None of us has dreamed of such a thing. Was not the Church, she who belongs to no party and to no caste, founded for all men: not only for the poor and lowly who will al-

ways have her preference, as they had that of Jesus, but also for the rich and mighty to whom she preaches the winning of the kingdom of heaven through justice and charity?

As to the other three—even though they are Academicians—who can reasonably believe that their words and acts are opposed to democracy? François Coppée, the poet, who could by no means boast of exclusively bourgeois ancestry, sang all his life of the lowly. J. K. Huysmans snubbed both the *classes* and the *masses*, especially the former, and if, at Lourdes, he paid sincere and well-deserved compliments to the rich who become the humble servants, litter-bearers and nurses of the infirm poor, one feels upon reading the books written after his conversion, notably *Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam* and *Les Foules de Lourdes*, that his most heartfelt sympathy goes out to the people. Would it be rash to maintain that the determining occasion of Ferdinand Brunetière's conversion was his conversation with Leo XIII, the great pontiff of the working-

classes? Certainly not; others have said so, in fact I think even he himself. Moreover, even at the risk of having the democratic Brunetière accused or suspected of Americanism, he who so loved to bring up the question of the relations between democracy and Catholicism, I wish to quote these lines of his which I find highly suggestive. "I remember reading in the *Life of Father Hecker* that, after he had tried more than one sect . . . one of the most powerful and decisive reasons of his final conversion to Catholicism was the satisfaction and the curb, *the curb and the satisfaction* that Catholicism alone seemed capable of giving to his popular and democratic instincts. He had begun . . . by being a baker. I have been spared this hard apprenticeship of life but, like him, in Catholicism only have I found the curb and the satisfaction of the same instincts and of the same ideal;¹

¹ In a note he says: "One might sum up the story of Father Hecker's conversion in a still more striking way—which would be paradoxical in appearance only—by saying that he became a 'Catholic' so that with impunity, he might be or might remain a 'democrat'."

Ayant la nuque dure aux saluts inutiles,
Et me dérangeant peu pour des rois inconnus,

there only have I found the justification of the motto in which I continue to believe, (*Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*) and I have tried to show you that, if its foundation is to be met with only in the Christian idea, there and there alone need we look for its true interpretation." ¹

With this and similar assertions we can, in the present instance, afford to smile at the efforts of M. Sageret who, by a series of pin-pricks endeavors to explode the importance of this adherence and who doubtless finds that with Brunetière, the Church may really have too much influence even over the terrestrial interests of society. It is indeed patent that M. Sageret's book was written merely with a view to deadening the blow which the " conversions " of our new recruits dealt to the camp of free-thought, and to broadening the gap, already so broad in France, between the Church and Science, between the Church

¹ *Les raisons actuelles de croire, see Discours de combat, new series, pp. 46-47.*

and the People. Hence was I not right in laying particular stress upon the value of our converts' testimony, a value which the surly attitude of the enemy has but served to enhance?

V.

I would like to discuss with you still another idea, which seems naturally connected with the preceding ones and which, although of lesser moment, is certainly not lacking in interest.

Among free-thinkers it is understood (or at least ardently desired) that Catholics, as such, have no real talent nor learning. When they make a speech or attempt to write, their religion, which is grave and austere, renders them absolutely insipid and tiresome; it causes them to adopt a *sermonizing tone, a style that savors of the Semaine Religieuse and a scholastic style*; these are the highest compliments that can be paid to their best oratorical and rhetorical attainments. Dogma, which enslaves reason, prevents all personal research in the scientific, his-

torical or exegetical field because everything is "dictated in advance!" Moreover, as spicy subjects are forbidden them, it follows that, in the domain of letters, as in that of scientific research, they can produce nothing either valuable or pleasing. By way of replying to this direct imputation, they cite a few names, for instance those of Bossuet and Pascal—not to mention many others belonging to the seventeenth century and a smaller number belonging to the eighteenth and nineteenth,—and of such scholars as Hermite, Pasteur and de Lapparent, to speak only of the dead. But some of these are very remote and others are such rarities! This opinion, shrewdly propagated by the enemy, has become almost a dogma for Catholics themselves who, with lamb-like docility, accept the ready-made lesson and abide by it. As a result, either they do not read Catholic authors at all or else read them but very little, and this "state of soul," which has permitted the conspiracy of silence to be organized against them and has favored this bias, nay, I shall even

say this injustice, has perhaps not yet reached its limit. . . . However, nowadays Catholics are becoming more courageous and are taking note of their forces.

But when, from the opposite camp, a man of great talent, a Louis Veuillot or a Ferdinand Brunetière comes back to the Church and to God, there is great joy in the true fold whereas with the enemy there is bitter disappointment and suppressed rage. To the one side such a conversion seems an extraordinary acquisition; to the other, it is a shock which, for the moment, is so paralyzing as to preclude all active resentment. Still, let us beware, for the enemy is constantly on the alert and never disarmed. After Jules Lemaître — that artist of exquisite taste with whom you are acquainted, that writer whose language is so clear and pleasing — went over to Nationalism, there were not wanting those who declared that the first of his subsequent books and discourses showed a strange deterioration both in style and talent. Pascal was certainly right when he said that self-interest

is a wonderful instrument for the agreeable putting out of one's eyes!¹ Hence, timidly at first, and, as it were, slyly, then more confidently and finally with a shrill, trumpet-like voice it is proclaimed that the neophytes have never had the mentality attributed to them (and thus they are outrageously slandered,) or else that since their conversion, there has been an end to the vigor of their natural faculties and the charm of their style. Faith is an extinguisher: it is meet to weep over these extinguished lights . . . and genuine tears (crocodile tears) are shed! . . . M. Sageret, whom I have so often quoted, openly ridicules Huysmans; jests about Coppée's ostentatious prosaism; criticises Bourget's "barbarisms" by trying to show through a play upon words that "he has ignored the *traditions* of French prose"; and, doubtless because unable to pick flaws in Brunetière's language, harps upon the great writer's paradoxical tone and the obstinacy and "contradictory bent" of his mind.

¹ *Pensées*, art. 3. 3.

Perhaps M. Sageret's method will find favor with men of Homais' type figuring so prominently in the principal towns of our cantons; perhaps it may even make some impression on weak, timid Catholics: however, serious-minded men will only shrug their shoulders and, recalling the latest productions of our converts, decide that their new works differ totally from the old in that they are far more touching and comprehensive.

If, in his last years, François Coppée produced fewer verses, the blame can only be laid to his advancing age and the racking pains of disease; but, for all that, *La Bonne Souffrance* is a more affecting book than any of its predecessors.

And what decadence was noticeable in Brunetière's talent after his "Visit to the Vatican"? Blessed with an erudition as extensive and as well-sustained as ever, did he not remain the same vigorous reasoner, the same eloquent logician, the same forceful thinker with, however, additional intensity of conviction? His intellect broadened instead of shrinking, and

his heart imbibed from faith a new ardor which was communicated to his hearers and readers through the medium of his lectures and his books.

Catholicism has refined and purified Paul Bourget's psychology. To be sure, since his return to God, the author has solved fewer *cruel enigmas* and related fewer *crimes of love*; but who bemoans the fact? His social romances such as *L'Etape*, *Un Divorce* and *L'Emigré*, have abundantly compensated us. Besides, if these books indicated a lack of ability, do you suppose that they would be so fiercely attacked on all sides?

As to J. K. Huysmans, even if he retained some or nearly all the defects of his earlier days, how conspicuously and how imposingly do not his good qualities stand out in his later works! *La Cathédrale*, *Sainte Lydwine*, *L'Oblat* and especially *Les Foules de Lourdes*, contain some very substantial pages which are not only charming and eloquent but fairly vibrating with truth and palpitating with life.

We Catholics can afford to be somewhat

proud of all this. Our faith, far from injuring art, purifies and ennobles it; opens up to it new horizons; imparts to it a full, resonant ring and a captivating eloquence formerly unknown to it, likewise a fresh, bright hue which causes all the *Lodges* of the universe to wither up with spite.

VI.

The Church, then, has good reason to rejoice and take pride in the recruits who come to swell her army. By going forth in each age to place themselves under her standard, they are a peremptory proof of her divine vitality and also of that marvelous plasticity which, notwithstanding the immutability of her faith and morals, has enabled her to adapt herself to all times, races, climates, civilizations and intellects, as well as to the most diverse temperaments. According to the recommendation of her Divine Founder she goes through the world preaching to every creature a doctrine that seems hard—*durus est hic sermo*¹—inasmuch as it surpasses our rea-

¹ St. John, VI chap., 61 v.

son and thwarts our imperious passions; nevertheless, she commands attention and men of the finest intellect, when not victims of the corroding cancer of pride, have been found mingling with the eager throngs of simple, lowly believers who besiege her pulpits and reverently obey her commandments. This is because Christ is ever young, ever living and victorious. He was yesterday; He is to-day; He will be to-morrow and the Catholic Church, the work of Christ which His enemies proclaim to be always moribund, participates in His unchangeable youth and undying life. She takes noble revenge upon her adversaries by praying for them and then by making magnificent conquests among them.

These chosen recruits are a specific reply to the erroneous but quite widespread assertion according to which "the believer believes and scarcely thinks", because it is said that "even though intelligent, he does not know why he is a Catholic if he has never ceased to be

one; ”¹ and indeed it is possible that some intelligent men thus content themselves, although wrongfully, with the unquestioning faith of the unlettered. At all events, those who renounce incredulity for faith, reach their decision only after many a heart-wrench, after deep reasoning and earnest reflection and, on this account, the step which they take is quite as gratifying to us as it is galling to contentious unbelievers.

At the same time, owing to this travail of soul, they are better qualified to grasp and to teach us what *actually* constitutes the controversy between the soldiers of the Church and those of the “ world ”; what objections the science of the day raises against our faith and by what defense and arguments these objections may be met. Men of this type shed a great light on apologetics, because their hesitations and their struggles are of the same value to those who apply themselves to the study of religion, as are the sketches and out-

¹ *Les Grands Convertis*, p. 10.

lines of the pictures of the masters to pupils who would learn to draw and paint. After all, could not a Paul, brought up in Judaism and Hellenism,¹ or an Augustine, who had plodded through Greek and Roman philosophy and wandered into Manichaeism, more effectually teach others how to direct their efforts? However, without bringing these into the case or, above all, comparing them with our modern converts, as the one was directly enlightened by Christ and the other is perhaps the greatest genius of Christianity, are not a Newman and a Manning of incomparable value to us in the conflict of ideas wherein the fate of souls is at stake? So also, due allowance being made, is a Ferdinand Brunetière, although I do not dream, even in a most remote way, of classifying him as a *Father of the Church*. Perhaps you remember the plan of action that he mapped out at Tours, July 23, 1901, for *la Jeunesse Catholique*, and which, if not complete, was at least very substantial and

¹ At Tarsus where there were celebrated schools.

beautiful. By your kind leave we shall read it over together so that we may enjoy its simple grandeur and appropriateness.

“ . . . Look at things as they are.¹ You are dealing with men of *intellectual* pride and any advantage you gain over them is achieved in spite of them. They must be shown that, regardless of certain scholars, science never could and never shall prejudice the claims of religion. ‘ They are separate domains ’, said Claude Bernard, ‘ in which each thing must remain in its place ’. And he added: ‘ This is the only way to avoid confusion and insure progress in the physical, intellectual, political and moral order.’ To these *intellectuals* it must be made known that science has not suppressed mystery any more than the immutability of nature’s laws has, so to speak, closed the world against the action of the supernatural. It must be made clear to them that, far from opposing the development of religious pro-

¹ He had just said that for acquiring the mastery over our enemies *social action* does not suffice.

gress, immutability of dogma is that on which this progress depends; that this immutability of dogma is the sole basis of morality, if there be no morality without an imperative voice to command and a sanction to guarantee it; that this morality, the morality of the *Decalogue* and of *the Sermon on the Mount*, is the common, indivisible, universal and inalienable possession of all humanity; that true progress, perhaps the only progress worthy of the name . . . , would be to succeed in engraving upon all hearts the ordinances of this moral code, and finally, that Christianity alone is capable of furthering and maintaining this progress: I mean Christianity purged of all party spirit and restored, so to speak, to its universality.”¹

The quotation is somewhat lengthy, but I feared to abridge it lest, by so doing, I should fail to convey a just impression of the services which the Church may expect from minds of this calibre, when they are drawn to her by the magnet of truth.

¹ *L'Action catholique*, see *Discours de combat*; new series, pp. 119-120.

Having become a sincere Catholic, the lecturer would now and then, as occasion presented itself, develop this plan or rather these few ideas that were so dear to him, intending to treat them at greater length in his apology. The day after his death another Academician remarked that he was "one of the few contemporary Catholic laymen who had read the *Summa* of St. Thomas and the only one competent to rewrite that *Summa* for our time."¹

Who knows, and, besides, what are such opinions worth? Nevertheless, in paying this tribute to the champion who fell before the allotted time of man, M. de Vogüé intended to praise the vastness of Brunetière's erudition, which was always abreast of the times, and the exceptional vigor of his reasoning. However,—and this conclusion of my work may surprise more than one of my readers—I should prefer that the rewriting of the *Summa*, were such a task possible to any contemporary, be done by one whose intellect had never

¹ *Ferdinand Brunetière*, by Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé in the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*, Jan. 1, 1907.

been tainted by error and heresy. Consider what even in this our enlightened day, happens to Newman's name and doctrine and think how grieved the illustrious convert would be to see that notwithstanding the absolute purity of his intentions, which are clearly hostile to Modernism, and the perfect serenity of his faith, there are some in England and here in France who falsely interpret his teaching. This is because, in spite of our relinquishment of them, intellectual habits leave a lasting impression on the soul.¹ Hence it is that, for the rewriting of the *Summa*, I should recommend a great mind trained from infancy in the appreciation of Catholic truth and keenly alive to the needs and aspirations of its time; a resurrected Thomas Aquinas, a non-Gallican Bossuet

¹ Such men, honorable, intelligent and Christian though they be, do not always prove themselves "prudent to the point of scrupulosity nor distrustful to the point of prejudice, where novelties of doctrine are concerned." I highly appreciate the sentiment thus expressed by Louis Veuillot who himself was such an admirable convert and valiant soldier of the Catholic Church.

or, not to soar so high, a Pie, a Freppel or a d'Hulst. . . . Let such a one arise and, amid the chaos of so many clashing opinions, come to our assistance and build for us that "palace of ideas" wherein other wanderers, tired of ever evolving systems, may rest for a time in peace of soul and in the happiness of light and truth! *Exoriare aliquis!*

Meanwhile, let us give thanks to God for rescuing these men of brilliant intellect from the encircling gloom of error and leading them back to the light of truth and the bosom of the Catholic Church, there to be a victorious testimony in her favor and her champions in time of conflict. Since their conversion they have proved by the arguments written in their books, as also by their personal experience, that the ceaseless yearning of every human heart for God, can never be wholly satisfied save in the Catholic Church. Yes, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."

